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ABSTRACT

Intended to help educators better understand the behavior of students from Southeast Asia as a function of culture, the paper provides information on family life. Childrearing attitudes are considered for the infant to toddler (0-3 years) age span and the preschool child (3-5 years). A chart compares child rearing practices in American and Vietnamese, Cambodian, H'Mong, and Laotian cultures. The analysis of cultural influences on family relationships shows Southeast Asian parents to be controlling, restrictive, and protective of their children and the importance of the clan structure in the H'Mong culture. A similar chart compares family relationships across the cultures. Finally, a list of "do's" and "don'ts" for school administrators and classroom teachers completes the paper. (DB)

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Considerations for Educators in Working With Southeast Asian Children and Their Families

Who Are The Southeast Asian Refugees?

The fall of Saigon in April, 1975 marked the end of the United States' prolonged involvement in a war that ravaged the Southeast Asian countries of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

A tragic legacy of the American involvement in the Southeast Asian war is the fate of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian families who have been adversely affected in many ways: loss of family members; loss of freedom; and mass resettlement, and reeducation of families. To understand their plight all one need do is read the newspaper accounts of the many boat-people who spent years in refugee camps (Philipines, Malaysia, Hong Kong) with little or no hope of reaching a country which will provide freedom and a chance for a better life.

So massive is the world refugee movement that a monthly journal entitled **Refugee** is now published by the United Nations. In it appears story after story of worldwide refugees (many of them Southeast Asians) who seek asylum, freedom from oppression and opportunities for a productive life by immigrating to another country. Among the countries that have reached out to hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asian refugees are Australia, New Zealand, Philipines, France, Canada, and the United States.

Since 1975, the United States has accepted over 800,000 Southeast Asian refugees and offered federal, state, and local public and private agency funding for resettlement programs for these individuals. The bulk of the refugees settled in California, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington (California Report, 1980). It should be noted that burgeoning birth rate of the Southeast Asians has raised their population to 1,000,000 since 1975.

Many of the refugees who fled their native land had worked alongside Americans in Southeast Asian countries. Some served in the armed forces under U.S. supervision, while others worked for the U.S. Government. When conditions forced them to seek refuge from their native land, many applied for entry into the United States, France, and Canada. Unlike the latter two countries which accepted primarily wealthy or well-educated refugees, the U.S. generously agreed to re-settle refugees, irrespective of their social class, and employment skills (San Joaquin County Newsletter, 1985).

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The term "Southeast Asian" is a descriptor covering several unique and diverse sub-groups, groups with their own history, customs, and values. Among the largest of the refugee groups are: (1) Vietnamese; (2) Cambodian; (3) Lao; and (4) H'Mong. Because of the cultural differences among these people, each one must be treated as a distinct group. Even though these sub-groups share some cultural values, they differ, sometimes significantly, in other areas. For example, marriage customs are markedly different for all sub-groups. When the Vietnamese or H'Mong marry, it is traditional for the newly-married couple to live with the husband's family. In the Cambodian culture, however, it is optional as to which spouse's family the couple will live with. In still another variation, the Lao couple will usually live with the wife's family.

Conspicuous differences exist between the individual national cultures of the several Southeast Asian groups. The differences between the cultural values, folkways, pasttimes of the various segments of the U.S. population and the cultures of Southeast Asians are vast and often diametrically opposed. For example, most Americans tend to be upwardly mobile, driven to be financially independent, materialistically oriented and highly competetive. Individual rights are held as sacrosanct.

In contrast to these values, Southeast Asians tend to live on a day-to-day basis (strongly influenced by the war-related conditions), cooperation as opposed to competition is stressed, and they perceive the family rather than the individual as the basis for societal functioning. Individuals in our society go the extraordinary lengths to bring attention to themselves and their achievements. Amongst Southeast Asians, to call attention to oneself is considered to be offensive as it detracts from the family. Their focus is on teaching children to work harmoniously with one another without singling out any one person for special recognition or credit.

Why Then This Concern About Culture and Cultural Differences?

According to Downs (1975), "cultural behavior" is both consistent and predictable. He states that most of our behavior is learned, not instinctive and that our actions are products of "very complex learning process which developed into a system of symbols shared by a group of humans and transmitted by them to upcoming generations" (p. 45). These symbols, according to Downs, are not a random collection of customs and activities, but rather each culture tends to have some logic of its own that makes the various elements of culture related and interdependent.

Downs futher claims that this system of symbols has certain patterns which can be used to predict cultural behaviors. Thus, one of the keys to predicting human behavior is understanding the components of culture and the cultural value placed on these behaviors as determined by the system.

What is meant by the term "culture" and what are the varous cultural components? For years, anthropologists have debated hundreds of definitions and can not agree on one best definition. Kroeber and Kluckhorn (1952) reviewed some 164 definitions and concluded that "culture" consists of a core of essential traditional ideas along with an attached value system.

In a more simplistic definition of "culture", Linton (1959) states that culture is behavior that human beings learn from their elders and pass on to younger generations in the same culture. In what could be an interpretation of Linton's reference to behavior, Downs (1975) further suggests that culture can be viewed as a "mental map" which provides guidance to individuals in relating to his/her surroundings or other people. Downs cautions that "the idea of a mental map should not be confused with personality which is a special pattern of behavior that each individual possesses" (p. 49). According to Downs (1975), having one's own mental or cultural map, makes it easier to define reality and understand what is appropriate behavior in most situations. A cultural map also sets the rules for resolving problems or explaining events not normally encountered.

In order to help educators better understand the behavior of Southeast Asians as a function of culture, the following specific information is provided.

Family Life

The first loyalty of all Southeast Asians is to the family even above their allegiance to country or religion. The family represents a Southeast Asian's religious, economic, political and social unit. Americans are accustomed to health insurance, unemployment benefits, social security, rest homes, psychiatrists, and many other outside persons or agencies that provide support and assistance to the family. The Southeast Asian, in contrast, relies on his family instead. As a result there is a closeness among family members which is best decribed as a strong bond among all members. The focus is on maintenance and perpetuation of the family as a strong unit under any and all circumstances.

This paper briefly looks at the family, how it is structured, how it functions and some components which are part of this unit. These include child-rearing practices and family relationships.

Infant to Toddler (0-3 years). In contrast to the study of the western child, only a few observers, however, have studied the Southeast Asian child. Chan (1986), one of those observers, notes that infant/toddler childrearing practices among the four Southeast Asian sub-cultures are similar in many aspects, yet some practices vary considerably. He states that there is a significant commonality across ethnic groups with respect to traditional child-rearing practices.

For example, all four Southeast Asian cultural groups view the newborn child as a gift from heaven. The child is believed to be born with an innate potential for good. Nonetheless, parents believe that children must receive proper training in order to realize this potential. Although perceived by the parents as being quite helpless, the young child is provided a great deal of freedom (viewed as highly permissive by Americans), as the child is not held responsible for his actions. Tolerance and permissiveness, then, is commonplace in Southeast Asian parent/child interactions. The tendency is for parents to provide immediate gratification for their infants' early dependency needs. Mothers especially provide close physical contact in many ways (i.e., children usually sleep in the same room or bed with their parents and, in the Cambodian culture, up to age 10). Very young children are not subjected to rigid schedules as parents have different expectations (compared to American

standards) in weaning and self-feeding. For example, Vietnamese and Laotian children may breast feed up to two years of age, Cambodian up to three, and H'Mong up to four years old.

All Southeast Asian children throughout the infant and toddler years are provided a safe, nuturant and predictable environment by all family members, providing a solid foundation for the development of strong family ties (Chan, 1986).

Preschool Years (3-5 years). When a Southeast Asian child reaches preschool age he begins to assume greater responsibility for his own behavior. Parents expect him to become more self-sufficient by dressing and grooming himself and assuming responsibility for carrying out assigned chores. Additionally, as the child enters school, he is further trained to become independent within the family as he is included in adult activities such as weddings, funerals, and social and business functions. The preschool child receives early opportunities to learn appropriate patterns of social behavior through active and frequent participation in adult affairs. At this age, parent-child relationships are more formal and adult demands more rigidly enforced (Chan, 1986). Increased discipline replaces the permissiveness and indulgence which the child encountered as an infant or toddler.

For example, parents punish their children for several culturally unacceptable behaviors; disobedience; failure to fulfill primary responsibilities, and aggression (especially sibling-directed). Forms of punishment include either threatening to or temporarily removing a child from the family household (e.g., locking child outside the home), and/or isolating the child from the family social life. Other forms of punishment include the use of shaming, scolding, or guilt induction, resulting in "loss of face" by the child. Children are strongly urged to consider the negative impact of their unacceptable behavior on others. In particular, the parents stress the shame felt by the others when such behavior occurs. Ridicule and rejection are other forms of punishment used to "shape" Southeast Asian children's behavior.

In contrast, some behaviors are highly valued and the preschool child is reinforced for behaviors such as completing chores and academic achievement. However, these behaviors are recognized only indirectly as the child is expected to do well in these areas. According to the parents, the child should not receive rewards for behaviors he is expected to demonstrate. Accomplishments are usually acknowledged in the form of parent encouragement to do even better and strive for higher levels of achievement. This attitude is also reflected in the family discouragement of praising oneself or family members in this presence of non-family members. When a child (or adult) is given a compliment, it is often dismissed or negated by immediate discussion of one's faults through self-deprecating remarks (Chan, 1986). See Table 1 for a summary of child-rearing practices.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF CHILD-REARING PRACTICES IN AMERICAN AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN CULTURES

AMERICAN	VIETNAMESE	CAMBODIAN	H'MONG	LAOS
. American children are usually born in a hospital.	In the countryside, Vietnamese prefer a mid-wife to deliver the child at home. She is often aided by female relatives. (Men, unmarried women, girls and the husband are not to be present.)	Same as Vietnamese.	H'Mong husband delivers the baby with the help of a mid-wife. Then he must stay home at least two or three days to care for wife.	Same as Vietnamese.
. After delivery, women can go anywhere, when able.	(See H'Mong) No time limit for Vietnamese women, but usually she stays in for one (1) week.	She stays home for seven (7) days. After the seventh day, she can go anywhere when able.	After delivery, a woman cannot go to visit relatives or friends. She must stay inside the house for one (1) month.	Same as Vietnamese.
. No such custom. (see H'Mong)	In the country, a woman may deliver at her home.	Same as Vietnamese.	When a girl becomes pregnant, the parents will build a temporary shelter for her outside of her parent's house where she can deliver the baby. During the first month after delivery, she cannot enter any house but must stay in the shelter.	Same as Vietnamese.
. Child is one year old at the end of one year of life.	When a child is born he/she is counted a one (1) year old.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese

AMERICAN	VIETNAMESE	CAMBODIAN	H'MONG	LAOS
Cont.:				
5. Breast fed up to 9 months/1 year.	In general, an infant is breast fed up to two (2) years.	Same as Vietnamese, but up to three (3) years.	Same as Vietnamese, but up to four (4) years.	Same as Vietnamese.
6. Sons and daughters are valued equally.	Sons are valued more than daughters.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.
7. Young children have much independence.	Children have to obey and respect their parents and do not have much independence.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.
8. Young children are sometimes spoiled.	Young children are strictly disciplined.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.

Family Relationships

Southeast Asian children are taught to view their role within the family and society in terms of relationships and obligations. That is, each child (as well as all family members) must develop a sense of moral obligation and primary loyalty to the family. Therefore, it is imperative that only those behaviors which maintain and enhance the family name and home are valued. Along with this, Chan (1986) cites the "pride and shame" principle whereby individual behavior is said to reflect on the entire family. On the one hand, highly-valued individual academic or occupational achievements promote the family pride, but, on the other hand, negatively-valued behavior (e.g., disobedience, disrespect, shirking responsibilities), results in a collective family shame.

Thus, there is a strict code of conduct expected of all Southeast Asian family members. In contrast to the American emphasis on egocentric behavior, the Southeast Asian child is trained to think of the family first and must learn to subjugate his own personal desires and concerns. Parents, in an attempt to control their children's behavior, appeal to the child's sense of obligation to others.

The picture that emerges of Southeast Asian families is one of the parents being controlling, restrictive and protective of their children. In contrast, American parents foster self-reliance, assertiveness, looking out for "Number One", and expression of feelings, including grief, unhappiness, and other such emotions. With Southeast Asian children, the opposite is true. Children are taught to suppress aggressive behavior, overt expressions of negative emotions, and personal grief. Instead, they must inhibit strong feelings and exercise self-control in order to maintain "family harmony".

Verbal communication between parent and child is typically avoided in Southeast Asian families. Frank discussions (e.g., sexual topics) seldom, if ever, occur in these families. In contrast, American parents constantly strive to keep the communication lines open. No subject is taboo for American parents to discuss with their children. Open, candid discussions of sex are commonplace in American families. Further, Americans openly show affection in public whereas Southeast Asians consider physical contact and public expression of affection embarrasing.

What verbal communication that does take place in the Southeast Asian family is usually one-way; parent to child. When the parent speaks the child is expected to listen. The father is especially "distant" in his communication with his children as he does not generally initiate "talks" with them. Mother-child relationships are often closer, more verbal. Father-mother interaction is usually through indirect communication, inferences, and unstated feelings.

American parents can be characterized as ones who are always widening their circle of friends and acquaintances (e.g., joining clubs, inviting friends over, encouraging their children to "make new friends"). In contrast, Southeast Asian parents appear to distrust "outsiders". One explanation of this seeming lack of trust is that Southeast Asian parents, in an effort to control and protect their children, attempt to restrict their childrens social interaction by allowing

access to only "acceptable" role models, such as family members and close friends. This approach is also reflected in the dependence children have on their parents until a relatively late age (by American standards) and the encouragment of even married children to live with their parents. American young men and women, upon marriage are expected to "set up housekeeping" with their spouses outside the parent's home and develop an autonomy that is much different from Southeast Asian young adults.

In an extension of the emphasis on the nuclear family, Southeast Asian families encourage three, four, and, sometimes five, generations to live under one roof. Family size is often very large, ranging from 4-8 children. Large families serve as a source of pride for Southeast Asians. The average American family size seldom exceeds four children.

Another contrasting value is the perception of the male and female roles in Souotheast Asian and American cultures. In the American culture, equality for women, both legally and mentally, has been fostered by society for years. Generally, women in the United States have equal status with men and are treated as equal marriage partners. Both law and recent tradition protect this right of equality.

The male in the Southeast Asian cultures is considered dominant. The Southeast Asian woman is taught first to obey her father, then her husband, and in case of her husband's death, she is expected to obey her eldest son. The Southeast Asian husband is considered "superior" in all matters, legal and marital. The wife is subordinate to and must obey her husband in all circumstances. See Table 2 for a summary of family relationship values.

One unique characteristic of the H'Mong culture is its emphasis on the clan as a social unit. According to Barney (undated), the H'Mong is a patritineal system in which the society is divided into social groups (class) and a child, at birth, automatically becomes a member of his father's clan. The clan serves to interrelate all aspects of the H'Mong culture, including social, political, economic and religious matters.

The basic unit of the clan is the "household" which has a broad interpretation by including all members of the extended family, sometimes 30-40 persons. Clan members refer to one another as "my youngers and olders". Thus, a household may have many houses nearby one another holding all clan members and headed by the eldest male or "householder."

Among the responsibilities of the householder are: (1) to train the children with all household members taking part; (2) maintaining the H'Mong reverence for old age by insisting upon respect for elders; and (3) generally overseeing the day-to-day activities of each household member (Barney, uncated).

The clan, as part of the H'Mong culture, is important in matters of marriage and dealing with disputes both within and outside the clan. As all clan members perceive each other as brothers or sisters, it is forbidden for one to marry within his own clan. Should disputes arise inside or outside the clan, the clan leader is looked to for resolutions of the problem. Thus, the H'Mong are not only members of a nuclear and extended family, but they are considered a member of a household and clan as well. Loyalty, therefore is not just to oneself, but also to the other three levels (Vang, 1979).

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN AMERICAN AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN CULTURES

AMERICAN	VIETNAMESE	CAMBODIAN	H'MONG	LAOS
1. The family relationship is not always close.	It is very close in Vietnam.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese. Clan is the basic social unit.	Same as Vietnamese.
2. Two generations (parents and children) live in a home.	Three or four, some-times five, generations live under one roof.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.
3. Often old-aged parents live in a nursing home.	Elders live with children and usually are taken care of by a daughter-in-law or by grandchildren.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.	Elders prefer to live with their daughters and grand-children.
4. Grown-up unmarried children live separately and independently.	Children still stay with the parents.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.
5. Spouses are considered equal legally and mentally.	The husband is superior and the wife is a sub-ordinate.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.
6. Women are independent and have equal legal and marital rights.	Women, in general, must obey their father (when they are young and un-married, then their husband, then their eldest son (in the case of the death of the husband).	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.
7. Have small families (2-4).	Traditionally, Vietnamese have large families. Small families are now en-couraged.	Parents are proud of a large family.	Same as Vietnamese.	Same as Vietnamese.

Impact on U.S. Educational System

The tremendous differences that exist between Southeast Asian and U.S. value systems have caused numerous problems for the Southeast Asian's assimilation into the U.S. school system. According to Bui (1983), those refugees who arrived in 1975 and shortly thereafter "are doing very well in school." This group learned English quickly and many were mainstreamed after only a year or two of learning English as a second language. Bui notes that these children are quite Americanized as they dress like Americans, speak like Americans and do not want to be associated with the "boat people".

In contrast, those refugees who have arrived in the U.S. in the past several years have had a much more difficult time adjusting to the U.S. way of life. A large majority are undereducated or uneducated, especially in the H'Mong and Cambodian groups. Many have spent months, even years in refugee camps, attempting to learn English, suffering from a lack of food, clothing and medicine. Many families were separated as family members were executed or permanently separated by the war. Twenty seven percent of the refugee children have no parents or only one parent in the U.S., (Bui, 1983).

In light of the previous discussion on cultural differences, the following suggestions are offered as a way of assisting teachers and administrators in dealing with Southeast Asian children and their families.

TIPS TO AMERICAN EDUCATORS IN DEALING WITH SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDENTS

Compiled by

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DO'S	DON'TS
A. Administrators	
- Help Southeast Asian students feel welcome and comfortable.	- Make them feel isolated and strange.
- Employ bilingual staff member if possible.	- Just add any other teacher.
- Use team-teaching method; one bilingual teacher and one monolingual teacher.	- Use traditional and lecture method with one English speaking teacher.
- Use the services of Southeast Asian speaking teacher or teacher aide.	- Just add any one to do the services.
- Develop or search for special instructional materials.	- Use the same instructional materials as the Anglo-American students.
- Develop careful language laboratory for them to practice.	- Ignore that they need extra practice in English.
- Organize in-service training for staff members who are involved in working with them.	- Assume your teachers can deal tactfully and conficently with the Southeast Asian children.
- Have orientation for them and their parents (school policies, classes, extra-curricular activities and so on.)	- Assume that Southeast Asian students are completely Westernized.
- Develop strong community-school-parent cooperation.	- Neglect Southeast Asian parents because they can't speak English.

B. Classroom Teachers

- Use daily and basic English vocabulary in speaking to them.	- Use slang, figurative language or colloquial expressions.
- Use simple and short grammatical structures.	- Use long and complex sentences leading to frustration.
- Speak distinctly, clearly and simply.	- Speak too rapidly and slur the words.
- Speak softly and slowly.	- Scream or speak too fast.
- Give written assignments and important instructions.	- Give homework assignments or crucial instructions orally. Southeast Asian children understand written English better than when it is spoken.
- Use peer group instruction in their native language.	- Separate Southeast Asian students from each other.
- Select willing American students to help them, if possible.	- Assign opposite sex students to help.
- Assign team-work with American students.	- Assign them to work with American opposite sex students.
- Encourage them to seek help whenever they need it.	- Suppose they are self-confident and self-sufficient.
- Teach them English as a second language as soon and rapidly as possible.	- Assume that their English ability is adequate in the classroom situation.
- Use audio-visual aids as much as possible.	- Assume that they understand teachers explanation thoroughly.
- Encourage them to speak up, if possible.	- Push them to speak up if they don't seem ready for it.
- Encourage them to raise questions if possible.	- Push them if their English is not yet good enough.

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